4

A

SERMON,

PREACHED AT

SALTERS-HALL, April 7th, 1788.

LONDON, 7th April, 1788.

At a Board of the Correſpondent Members in London of the Society in Scotland (incorporated by Royal Charter) for Propagating Chriſtian Knowledge in the Highlands and Iſlands,

Reſolved,

That the Thanks of this Board be given to the Rev. ROBERT WINTER, for his Sermon preached this Day before the Board; and that he be deſired to permit the ſame to be printed for the uſe of the Society.

J. MACKINTOSH, Secretary.

The happy Tendency and extenſive Influence of the Chriſtian Diſpenſation.

4.

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PREACHED AT

Salters-Hall, April 7th, 1788.

BEFORE

THE CORRESPONDENT BOARD IN LONDON

OF THE

SOCIETY IN SCOTLAND

(Incorporated by Royal Charter)

FOR

PROPAGATING CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE

In the Highlands and Iſlands.

By ROBERT WINTER.

4

Publiſhed at the Requeſt of the Society and of the Correſpondent Board in London.

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MDCCLXXXVIII.

TO

HIS GRACE

THE DUKE OF ARGYLE.

MY LORD,

THE Author of the following Diſcourſe feels himſelf peculiarly honoured, in being permitted to prefix to it the illuſtrious name of ARGYLE. The encouragement which your Grace's preſence and countenance gave to the Correſpondent Board of the Society in Scotland for propagating Chriſtian Knowledge, not only added greatly to the happineſs of the annual feſtivity, but will, doubtleſs, be the means of increaſing the reſpectability of an inſtitution, which has the beſt intereſts of Britain and of Religion in view; intereſts to which your Grace's warm and ſteady attachment is well known. To your Grace's patronage

theſe

theſe ſheets are inſcribed, in the hope that the importance of the deſign will atone for the deficiencies which may be found in the execution.

I have the honour to be,

MY LORD,

Your Grace's

Moſt obedient Servant,

HAMMERSMITH,
April 7, 1788.

ROBERT WINTER.

A

SERMON.

LUKE, II. 32.

"A LIGHT TO LIGHTEN THE GENTILES."

IT affords pleaſure to a benevolent obſerver of nature to think, that when the ſhades of the evening enlarge, and the gloom of night advances, the ſun, whoſe abſence occaſions the mournful alteration, is riſing on diſtant nations with his cheering ſalutary beams. It muſt have been much more pleaſing to the good old man, who uttered the words of the text, to reflect, that while the day of grace, which had long illuminated the deſcendents of Abraham, was drawing to a cloſe, and his own day of life haſtening to a period, the Sun of Righteouſneſs was riſing on the gentile world with healing in his wings.

By a particular revelation, which was deſigned to eſtabliſh his own faith, and that of thouſands beſides, God had aſſured him,

that he ſhould not ſee death, before he had ſeen the Lord's Chriſt. While this good man was engaged in the ſolemn worſhip of the Jewiſh temple, Mary the mother of our Lord, and Joſeph his reputed father, brought the holy child to preſent him to God, according to the directions preſcribed in the ancient ritual. The Spirit, who had aſſured Simeon, that his life ſhould be prolonged till he had ſeen the promiſed Meſſiah, now directed him to the young child in the arms of his mother, as the Meſſiah whom he longed to ſee. How delightful! how animated were his feelings on this happy occaſion! In the new-born child he beheld a proof of the divine faithfulneſs, not only to himſelf, but to Iſrael, to the world. He beheld an object, which, while it inſpired him with the moſt exquiſite joy, enabled him to look forward to death with fortitude and hope; and ſweetly conſtrained him, guided by the ſpirit of prophecy, to break forth in this elevated ſong of praiſe to God, while, with holy affection, he claſped the ſacred infant to his breaſt: "Lord, now letteſt thou thy ſervant "depart in peace, according to thy word; for "mine eyes have ſeen thy ſalvation; which "thou haſt prepared before the face of all "people; *a light to lighten the Gentiles*, and the "glory of thy people Iſrael."

To

To enter on the conſideration of this beautifully prophetic ſong, is not my preſent purpoſe. That part of it, which was read as the foundation of this diſcourſe, will lead our meditations to a ſubject both copious and inſtructive; and a ſubject nearly allied to the important deſign of this religious ſervice.

" A light to lighten the Gentiles." From the inſpired hiſtory of the New Teſtament it is evident, that theſe words are to be underſtood, not ſo much of the perſon, as of the doctrine, of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt. Peſonally, " he was not ſent but unto the loſt ſheep of the " houſe of Iſrael *." It was not till after his reſurrection, that his apoſtles received their commiſſion to " preach the goſpel to every " creature †." The goſpel which they publiſhed, the glory of which is, that it bears witneſs to the authority and grace of their Lord, is that light, which almighty wiſdom and infinite mercy had ordained, to lighten the Gentiles. So likewiſe we muſt underſtand many predictions of Iſaiah, and particularly that to which the text bears an evident reference; where the great God is repreſented as ſaying to the Meſſiah, " It is a light thing that

* Matt. xv. 24. † Mark, xvi. 15.

" thou ſhouldſt be my ſervant to raiſe up the
" tribes of Jacob, and to reſtore the preſerved
" of Iſrael: I will alſo give thee for a light to
" the Gentiles, that thou mayeſt be my ſal-
" vation unto the end of the earth *."

The text may be viewed, both as a deſcription of the tendency, and as a prediction of the ſucceſs, of the goſpel of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt. In theſe two lights we propoſe to conſider the ſubject.

I. The language of Simeon is deſcriptive of the tendency of the goſpel of Chriſt. What its tendency was to be, he intimates by the metaphor he uſes to deſcribe it. He calls it " a light," and ſpeaks of it as adapted " to " enlighten the Gentiles." In ſimilar language, the ancient prophets had ſpoken of the bleſſings which ſhould be introduced among men by the advent of the Meſſiah. " Ariſe, " ſhine, for thy light is come, and the glory " of the Lord is riſen upon thee †.—The " people that walked in darkneſs have ſeen a " great light: they that dwell in the land of " the ſhadow of death, upon them hath the " light ſhined ‡." The beauty of this meta-

* Iſa. xlix. 6. † Iſa. lx, 1. ‡ Iſa. ix. 2.

phor

phor arifes from its obvious fuitablenefs to repreſent the object meant to be deſcribed by it. In all ages, and in every country, light has been conſidered as emblematical of knowledge, purity, and joy. To no object is this alluſion ſo applicable as to the goſpel of Jeſus Chriſt, which brings with it the moſt intereſting inſtructions, and by theſe inſtructions introduces purity into the depraved mind, and joy into the deſponding heart.

1. It is the tendency of the goſpel to enlighten, by inſtructing us reſpecting thoſe objects which are moſt important to be known.

The knowledge of God is the foundation of all acceptable religion. To inſtruct men in the divine character and perfections was one great object of the revelation of the Meſſiah. The abſurdity of thoſe notions which the Pagans formed of the great Supreme, fully demonſtrated the neceſſity of an explicit revelation, to inſpire mankind with juſt ſentiments of God. The Jews had indeed much information on this head in the Old Teſtament. But no objects preſented to their view, in the pages of the ancient ſcriptures, gave them ſuch proper ſentiments of Deity, as thoſe which led their attention forward to the coming of the Meſſiah,

and foretold or prefigured the mediation which he was to accompliſh, and the government which he was to exerciſe. It remained for the Son of God himſelf, " when the fulneſs of the " time was come *," to reveal the character of his heavenly Father to a benighted world.

And how did he attain an end ſo important? Partly, by the admirable doctrines which he delivered; in which he repreſented God as at once the venerable governor and the amiable parent; partly, by the illuſtrious example of perfect virtue, which his own conduct exhibited, in which he diſcovered himſelf " the " brightneſs of his Father's glory, and the ex- " preſs image of his perſon †;" but chiefly by his ſufferings and death, in which he demonſtrated the holineſs and juſtice, the truth and faithfulneſs, the compaſſion and love of Deity, moſt happily uniting in the ſalvation of ſinful men.

It is the tendency of the goſpel likewiſe to inſtruct us in the knowledge of ourſelves, a ſcience which even thoſe who were untutored by revelation had diſcovered to have great influence on the conduct and happineſs of mankind; but in the means of attaining it

* Gal. iv. 4. † Heb. i. 3.

they

they were wretchedly defective. Behold the excellence of the gospel! While it reflects on the attentive, believing mind, "the glory of "the Lord," till it is "changed into the same "image *;" it presents likewise to the impartial enquirer, a true and faithful representation of himself. It removes the fair image of conscious virtue, which blinded prejudice had taught him to call his own. Even by the grace which it reveals, it shews him, that those who need such expressions of the divine mercy as it unfolds, must be both ignorant and depraved creatures; and through the influence of depravity, exposed to the just displeasure of a holy God.

But while it discovers the disease, it makes known the remedy; informing us in the accents of heavenly friendship, that "God so "loved the world, that he gave his only-be-"gotten Son; that whosoever believeth in him, "should not perish, but have everlasting life †." It instructs us too in the nature of holiness, addresses us on its behalf by the most persuasive motives, reveals that divine assistance which makes these motives successful, and strengthens the eye of hope to behold that "life and

* 2 Cor. iii. 18. † John, iii. 16.

"immor-

"immortality," which "he, who hath abo-
"lished death, hath brought to light*."

Now surely, on this very cursory view which we have taken of some of the discoveries of Christianity, we cannot but acknowledge, that Simeon had just ideas of it, when he celebrated the advent of the long-expected Messiah, as the arrival of one who should enlighten mankind.

2. Light is emblematical of purity; and the gospel merits the name of an enlightening dispensation, as it is the tendency of its doctrines to purify the hearts and lives of those who receive them. This application of the metaphor used in the text, appears to be founded in the attention we naturally discover in removing those blemishes from any object, which were unperceived or disregarded in darkness, but which the light has revealed. He who contents himself with viewing the gospel as a system of speculative truths, which have no corresponding influence on the temper and behaviour, can possess but a very partial acquaintance with its leading design. The name Jesus was given to the appointed Mediator for this express

* 2 Tim. i. 10.

reason;

reaſon; becauſe he was to "ſave his people "from their ſins *." The ſacred writers unanimouſly inform us, that "he gave himſelf for "us, to redeem us from all iniquity, and to "purify unto himſelf a peculiar people, zealous "of good works †." In ſhort, whoever ſeriouſly and impartially examines the New Teſtament, will ſoon be convinced, that to "pu-"rify the heart by faith ‡," is an object cloſely connected both with the doctrines which it reveals and the duties which it enjoins. Where ſhall we find ſuch a rich collection of moral precepts, as in the pages of the goſpel, flowing from "thoſe lips into which grace was pour-"ed §," and delineated by the pens of thoſe who were the appointed miniſters of "the doc-"trine according to godlineſs ‖?" Where ſhall we behold ſo bright a pattern of every thing amiable and good, as in the life of him, "who "was holy, harmleſs, undefiled, ſeparate from "ſinners ¶?" Where ſhall we ſee the deformity of ſin and the beauty of holineſs painted in ſuch lively colours, and in a manner ſo adapted to fill us with juſt ſentiments of truth, as on the croſs of the Son of God? The language which the ſufferings he endured addreſs

* Matt. i. 21. † Tit. ii. 14. ‡ Acts, xv. 9.
§ Pſalms, xlv. 2. ‖ 1 Tim. vi. 3. ¶ Heb. vii. 26.

to every one, who regards them in that light in which the ſcriptures repreſent them, is this; ſo great is the love of God to ſinners, that he gave his only-begotten Son for their redemption; ſo ſtrict in his regard to the rights of juſtice, and the honours of holineſs, that when his wiſdom ſaw fit to ſave men through the medium of an atoning ſacrifice, "he ſpared "not his own Son, but delivered him up for "us all *." If gratitude to the beſt of friends expand your hearts; if a deſire of reſembling him animate your conduct; "be ye holy;" for on the croſs of his Son it is written in lines of blood, "I the Lord your God am holy †."

Simeon then was actuated by the ſpirit of truth and grace, when he deſcribed the new-born Meſſiah as a light which ſhould enlighten the Gentiles.

3. With great propriety is this expreſſive metaphor uſed in the text, ſince joy, which is often ſignified by light, is the natural reſult of the revelation of the goſpel of Chriſt. It would be trifling with your time to enter into the minute diſcuſſion of a point ſo plain, and ſo univerſally admitted among the profeſſors of

* Rom. viii. 32. † Lev. xix. 2.

religion.

religion. The forgiveneſs of ſin, is an idea which cannot fail of inſpiring the labouring mind of the conſcious offender with eaſe and pleaſure; eſpecially when confirmed by evidence ſo ſupporting as the teſtimony of God; and flowing through a channel ſo wiſely and happily ſuited to it as the blood of his Son. The joys too ariſing from the divine friendſhip, from the contemplation of the ways of Providence, from the approbation of conſcience, and from the hope of eternal life, are the offſpring, not of fiction and enthuſiaſm, but of a ſtrong conviction of the truth, and ſtedfaſt perſeverance in holineſs.

Who that ſurveys the admirable principles, can doubt of the happy tendency, of Chriſtianity; or forbear moſt gratefully acknowledging his obligations to God for a revelation ſo rational in its evidence, ſo glorious in its diſcoveries, ſo eaſy in its requiſitions, ſo ſalutary in its effects, as the goſpel? This, this it is, which increaſes the joys of the proſperous, and ſoftens the ſorrows of the afflicted. It yields the trueſt direction and comfort in every changing ſcene of life, and "good hope through "grace *," in the awful hour of death.

* 2 Theſſ. ii. 16.

Such then is the tendency of Chriſtianity. It is a light to enlighten all to whom it is proclaimed. It informs the underſtanding, purifies the conſcience, and rejoices the heart. And who that knows by experience, that this is the native tendency of the goſpel, and is endued with that benevolence which it inſpires, can forbear wiſhing, praying, and ſtriving, that others may know and rejoice in it too?

But, not content with viewing the language of Simeon as deſcriptive of the tendency,

II. Let us fix our attention on it, as a prediction of the ſucceſs, of the goſpel of Chriſt.

The ſpirit of prophecy revealed to the good old man, what ſhould come to paſs in the latter days, and taught him that the goſpel of Chriſt, which was then riſing on the world, ſhould diſcover itſelf entitled to the appellation of light, by enlightening the Gentiles.

The prediction contains in it theſe two ideas; that the goſpel ſhould be publiſhed to the Gentiles, and that it ſhould produce among them the happy effects which the metaphor of enlightening has already ſuggeſted to us, of knowledge, purity, and joy. The truth of both

parts

parts of the prediction is confirmed by their accomplishment. It will be proper to give them for a few moments a separate consideration.

1. The prediction of Simeon plainly intimates that the gospel of Christ should be published to the Gentile world.

The knowledge and influence of true religion had, till the coming of the Messiah, been mostly confined to the Jews. "To them "pertained the adoption, and the glory, and "the covenants, and the giving of the law; "and the service of God, and the promises *." The gospel of Christ is a great improvement of the former dispensation, not only as it has given brighter discoveries of the chief objects of religion, but also, as it is intended for the benefit of human creatures of every distinction and every party. The descriptions which the apostles have given of the Christian Church, and of the design of the death of Christ to break down the wall of partition, which for many ages had subsisted, plainly shew, that the gospel was not intended to be confined, as the dispensation of Moses was, to any one parti-

* Rom. ix. 4.

cular claſs or body of men. The commiſſion which our Lord gave his apoſtles juſt before his aſcenſion into heaven, " to teach and bap-" tiſe all nations. *," " and to preach the goſ-" pel to every creature †," points out the authority on which Chriſt was to be " preached " to the Gentiles ‡." And that this has been the fact, is evident from hiſtory, and from the preſent ſtate of the world. From the little diſtrict of Judea, " the ſound went forth into " all the earth, and the words" of the apoſtles, the firſt miſſionaries of Chriſtianity, " unto " the uttermoſt parts of the world §." Through the interpoſition of Providence, ever watchful to promote its own kind deſigns, nations, the moſt diſtant in ſituation, and the moſt oppoſite in taſte and character, have been bleſſed with the publication of the goſpel. It is peculiarly worthy of notice, that the gradual improvements which have been made in the art of navigation, while they have contributed to the enlargement of commerce among the moſt remote countries, have likewiſe been the inſtruments of greatly ſpreading the diſcoveries of Chriſtianity. To theſe, we who dwell in this highly-favoured iſle, are indebted, under Pro-

* Matt. xxviii. 19. † Mark, xvi. 15.

‡ 1 Tim. iii. 16. § Pſalm xix. 4. Rom. x. 18.

vidence,

vidence, for all the religious information we poſſeſs. The exiſtence of the Chriſtan church at this day, diſperſed as it is through ſo many parts of the world, proves the prediction of the text to be in ſome meaſure fulfilled. Chriſt hath enlightened the Gentiles.

But we advance a ſtep further, and add,

2. Wherever the goſpel has been preached, it has been in a greater or leſs degree productive of the effects mentioned in the preceding part of this diſcourſe. It would diſcover groſs ignorance of human nature, or a degree of flattery, which would ill become the ſolemnity of an hour dedicated to religious improvement, were we to affirm, that every one who hears the goſpel is by means of it made wiſe, and good, and happy. Alas! many there are, even in this age of knowledge and inveſtigation, to whom the preaching of the croſs of Chriſt, though a diſcovery of the moſt conſummate wiſdom, appears to be fooliſhneſs. But many inſtances in every age have proved, that it has not been preached wholly in vain.

The ſucceſs which attended the preaching of the apoſtles was in the higheſt degree ſatiſfactory. It conſiſted not in a mere elevation

of the paſſions, deſtitute of connection with the judgement and conduct. The diſcoveries of divine truth unfolded the ſecrets of the heart, and forced thoſe who were impreſſed with them to cry out, ſtruck with a conſciouſneſs of aggravated guilt, "What ſhall we "do to be ſaved *?" By this moſt intereſting inquiry, they were led into an acquaintance with the grace which the goſpel reveals, and under its influence, to the purſuits of holineſs and the enjoyment of peace. By faith their hearts were purified; and what was recorded of one convert to the religion of Jeſus, might have been affirmed of all: "they went "on their way rejoicing †."

Such has been the influence of the goſpel in every age. It has had many converts; and thoſe who have received it, have by means of it had their minds enlarged, their hearts made better, and the pureſt pleaſures introduced into their boſoms. For the truth of this remark, we might appeal to the experience of every Chriſtian who has known the power, and felt the energy, of divine truth. But as this evidence is merely of a perſonal nature, we rather refer you to thoſe parts of the world which

* Acts, ii. 37. Acts, xvi. 30. † Acts, viii. 39.

hiſtory

hiſtory and report, if not actual inſpection, have enabled you to obſerve. The well-atteſted accounts, which have been often produced, of the converſion of Indians and other Pagans, ſhew that the goſpel, accompanied with a divine power, is greatly ſuperior to the moſt lamentable ignorance, and to the ſtrongeſt prejudices which can be formed in the human mind. And the effects which the belief of it has produced in them, have proved that its efficacy correſponds with its avowed deſign. The minds of thoſe who have become its votaries have been gradually enlightened with the moſt important inſtructions; their conduct has been greatly impoved; and they have appeared to poſſeſs that ſolid ſatisfaction, which nothing but a well-eſtabliſhed conviction of the truth could have produced. Nay, to bring the argument more within the compaſs of your own obſervation, we might appeal to ſome parts of our native country, in which the minds of the people were not much more cultivated than thoſe of Indian ſavages, till ſome active exertions for the promotion of knowledge and religion were introduced. And what has been the conſequence? Wherever theſe exertions have been ſucceſsful, the untutored mind has become pliable, and eaſy to be inſtructed; the ſavage heart has been ſoftened;

the

the behaviour, which was a disgrace to humanity, has been visibly reformed and amended; and the subjects of this great change have been as happy as before they were miserable. Alterations which come under this description, and which it would be very easy to produce, confirm the truth of Simeon's prediction, that the gospel of Christ should be a light to enlighten the Gentiles; not only by being published to them, but by producing among them the highly desirable effects of knowledge, holiness, and joy. Beautifully does the figurative language of ancient prophecy correspond with the spread of the everlasting gospel; the great event which it was meant to describe. "The wil-
"derness and the solitary place shall be glad,
"and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as
"the rose. It shall blossom abundantly, and
"rejoice, even with joy and singing; the glory
"of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the ex-
"cellency of Carmel and Sharon; they shall
"see the glory of the Lord, the excellency of
"our God.—Then the eyes of the blind shall
"be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be
"unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap
"as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing:
"for in the wilderness shall waters break out,
"and streams in the desert *." Thus diversi-

* Isa. xxxv. 1, 2. 5, 6.

fied,

fied, thus beneficial, have been the effects which the preaching of the gospel has produced among mankind.

Before we conclude, I beg leave to suggest to your attention two remarks of great importance, which are intimately connected both with what has been said, and with the great object of this assembly.

1. The evident fulfilment of the prophecy of Simeon confirms the claims of Christianity to the high character of a religion from God. The contemplation indeed of the wonderful efficacy of the gospel on the hearts and lives of those who have received it, is sufficient of itself to afford a strong argument in favour of its authenticity. Nor is this consideration unworthy the most serious attention of those who have either been unhappily overcome by the specious insinuations of scepticism and infidelity, or wish to be guarded against them. For surely the good and lasting effects which Christianity has produced, and which greatly surpass the effects of any other system professedly religious, indicate the cause to be divine, and prove the gospel to be what its first propagators style it, "the power of God unto salvation, to "every one that believeth *."

* Rom. i. 16.

But not only have these great effects resulted from the publication of Christianity; the fact was foretold from the very beginning of the gospel; yea, it was revealed to those "holy "men of God, who," long before the coming of Jesus Christ, "spake as they were moved "by the Holy Ghost *." Had Christianity, after the prediction of our text had explained the predictions of more ancient prophets, been confined to the Jews, or had its publication among the Gentiles been productive of no such effects as those which have now been mentioned, it would have proved itself an imposture. But, as we have seen, the fact has exactly answered to the prophecy. And what can afford a more convincing proof that the gospel derives its origin from that divine mind, which alone can penetrate the recesses of futurity, and lay open the events of unborn ages?—To proceed,

2. We have every reason for believing that the knowledge and influence of Christianity will be much more extensive than they now are.

This appears highly probable from the nature and tendency of the gospel itself. The

* 2 Pet. i. 2.

facts

facts which it relates, the discoveries which it reveals, and the duties which it enjoins, are such as respect the interests of all mankind. And therefore, from considering the known wisdom and goodness of the great Governor of the universe, there arises a strong probability, that he will not suffer any country under heaven to remain in total ignorance of the most effectual means of attaining knowledge, virtue, and happiness.

Such too is the benevolent tendency of the gospel, as to inspire those who possess a conviction of its truth and importance themselves, with a desire to diffuse the knowledge and influence of it to others. And this desire, exerting itself in various methods, according to the different abilities, opportunities, and dispositions of those who possess it, appears likely to be productive of a growing acquaintance with the gospel, and an increasing experience of its influence among mankind.

But this probability arises to a certainty, when we compare the present state of religion in the world, with the predictions contained in the sacred scriptures of the revival and spread of it. We are there informed, that "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of

"the Lord, as the waters cover the sea*;" that "the God of heaven shall set up a king-"dom which shall never be destroyed, and it "shall stand for ever†;" that there shall be given unto the Son of man "dominion, and "glory, and a kingdom, that all people, na-"tions, and languages should serve him‡;" that "the kingdom of heaven," or the dispensation of the gospel, "is like a grain of "mustard-seed, which a man took and sowed "in his field; which indeed is the least of all "seed; but when it is sown, it is the greatest "among herbs, and becometh a tree; so that "the birds of the air come and lodge in the "branches of it§." These predictions, with many more of a similar import, lead our attention to a much more general diffusion of the knowledge and influence of Christianity than at present obtains. As yet, multitudes of human beings are unacquainted even with the name of Christ. And it is melancholy to think what multitudes of those who profess Christianity are subjected to that most wretched abuse of it which prevails among the votaries of Rome. Nor can the sincere Christian think with indifference of the small appearances of

* Isa. xi. 9. † Dan. vii. 14.
‡ Matt. xiii. 31, 32. § Dan. ii. 44.

knowledge, piety, and zeal, which are to be found among those who profess the faith of the gospel in its purest forms. Surely the kingdom of Christ is not come in all its glory; surely the animated predictions of the triumphs of religion in the latter day are not fulfilled; while ignorance yet spreads itself over so great a part of the world; and superstition and lukewarmness have mingled themselves with a profession of religion in the church. We are comforted and animated by the hope of better days, and rejoice in every object which portends their approach.

These expectations are confirmed by considering the success of those exertions which have been, and are made, by the professors of the gospel, for the promotion of Christian knowledge. Among these, the institution which I am desired this day to recommend to your benevolent regards, bears a very conspicuous place. Its leading object is to propagate Christian knowledge in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. And in subordination to this, a second object is to encourage among the poor inhabitants of that remote and uncultivated part of Great Britain, such an attention to agriculture and manufactures, as will render them industrious and useful, and consequently

quently happy. For these purposes, in the beginning of this century, several respectable inhabitants of the city of Edinburgh resolved to erect and maintain charity-schools in those parts of the Highlands and Islands which most stood in need of their assistance. This resolution discovered, not only the true spirit of Christian benevolence, but also an accurate acquaintance with human nature; since experience has long proved, that nothing so much tends to prevent the baleful effects of ignorance, superstition, and vice, as early religious education. In the year 1713, they were able to maintain schools. The number of schools at this time is 156; and the number of children of both sexes, educated in them, nearly 8000. The importance of the last object, which respects their instruction in manufactures and agriculture, will readily be admitted by every one who wishes well to his country; and the much greater importance of the first, which regards the cultivation of their minds with Christian knowledge, by every one whose desires are directed to the prosperity of the kingdom of Christ, and the eternal happiness of his fellow-creatures. It reflects honour on the British government, that in both these views, this truly respectable Society has received the sanction of a Royal Patent.

The

The peculiar expedience of adopting this plan in the northern parts of Scotland arises chiefly from the notorious ignorance of the inhabitants, in consequence of their being unavoidably deprived of those stated means of instruction which other places enjoy; owing to the large extent of the parishes, and the difficulty of communication between the several parts often of the same parish.

This audience needs not to be informed, that ignorance is a soil very favourable to the growth of superstition. It will not therefore appear surprising, that popish emissaries have been both diligent and successful in spreading among this before benighted people, their false and pernicious tenets. And though much good has been done in counteracting their attempts by this extensively useful Society, continued exertions are necessary to confirm the advantages already obtained, to spread yet wider and wider the knowledge and influence of the gospel, "to give light to them that sit "in darkness and in the shadow of death, to "guide their feet into the way of peace *."

To promote these great objects, your generous contributions are this day solicited. They

* Luke, i. 79.

are

are objects of ſuch obvious importance, that they need not the arts of perſuaſion to recommend them. They have their beſt advocates in thoſe benevolent feelings which religion implants in the human breaſt. Conſider the worth of the ſoul; conſider its deplorable ſtate without knowledge and without religion; conſider the happy tendency of Chriſtian inſtruction; conſider the zeal which the patrons of ſuperſtition uſe in recommendation of their cauſe; conſider, oh! how ennobling the thought! conſider yourſelves as the inſtruments of fulfilling the great deſigns of Providence, and moſt celebrated predictions of ſcripture, while you are advancing the immortal happineſs of your fellow-creatures. You will need nothing more to be ſaid to induce you, by your prayers and your contributions, to forward the object of this day.

I cannot however conclude without reminding you of one conſideration ſuggeſted by the ſituation of Simeon when he uttered the words of the text. He was an old man, and had reaſons peculiar to himſelf for conſidering the appearance of the Meſſiah as an intimation that the time of his departure was at hand. And what enabled him to contemplate the near approach of death with compoſure and happi-

neſs, next to the humble hope of intereſt in the bleſſings of the Meſſiah's reign, but a firm perſuaſion that the Sun of Righteouſneſs, which was then dawning on the world, would never ſet; but would gradually diffuſe the light of knowledge, purity, and joy, to every nation under heaven?

So, when we cloſe our eyes in death, how pleaſing will it be to think that the goſpel which we profeſs to believe, will yet extend its triumphs! And how will the joys of faith on this intereſting occaſion be increaſed, if we can have any reaſon to hope that our feeble exertions in the cauſe of truth and righteouſneſs may be numbered among the inſtruments uſed by Providence for ſpreading the Redeemer's kingdom among men! And while this conſideration animates the generous contributions of this day, let us look forward with humble and joyful expectation to that delightful period, when "they that are wiſe ſhall ſhine as the "brightneſs of the firmament; and they that "turn many to righteouſneſs, as the ſtars for "ever and and ever *." Amen!

* Dan. xii. 3.

AN

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N. B. The firſt Patent reſpects the inſtruction of the children in the Society's ſchools, where they are educated in the principles of the Proteſtant Religion and Loyalty, and taught reading, writing, arithmetic, &c. The ſecond Patent authoriſes their being bred up to uſeful labour and induſtry, in agriculture, manufactures, and handicrafts.

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